

Drug and Human Trafficking: A Deadly Pandemic Threatening Our Children

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Drug Trafficking

Fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine have been brought into this country in alarming quantities, often described as enough to kill all 330 million Americans.¹ Fentanyl deaths are on the rise.

Although children are less frequently affected, their risk of death is real and growing rapidly. Deadly drugs are being pushed on children and young adults, destroying families and shredding the fabric of the nation. Hand in hand with the drugs is human trafficking, which is operating in the open at our southern border. Mexican drug cartels are experiencing record profits, with a smuggling economy of more than \$20 billion, and an estimated profit of \$2.6 billion this past year alone.²

Unprecedented amounts of illicit drugs like fentanyl are brought across our southern border. Last year more than 11,000 pounds of fentanyl made its way into the U.S. and more than half of it came right through the border of Mexico and San Diego, more than double the amount of fentanyl seized at the border compared with 2020.³ According to Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco, the pills are designed to look like painkillers and sold to unsuspecting victims, especially children and teens, who may think they are experimenting with other drugs. "America is being poisoned with fentanyl, and we don't even know it," said Sheriff Bianco.³

Fentanyl is one of the deadliest of the drugs abused in the U.S. From July 2019 to December 2021, there were 2,231 adolescent overdoses in the U.S. Of those, 89% involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, and in 58.9% this was the only drug. The median monthly overdose deaths among adolescents increased 109% between July–December 2019 and July–December 2021 in spite of a recorded decrease in overall illicit drug use. During that period, records showed 1,808 adolescent overdose deaths.⁴

According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 4,777 youth aged 15–24 died of an overdose of illicit drugs in 2019. American youth abusing illicit drugs has become common. By the time they are in 12th grade, 46.6% of teens have tried illicit drugs, and 21.3% of eighth graders have tried illicit drugs at least once.⁵ Because the majority of fentanyl deaths are accidental (fewer than 1% are suicides), this suggests that young people are unaware of the risk they are taking. It is alarming to think that among children as young as eighth grade, approximately one in five will try an illicit drug, unaware it could contain deadly fentanyl.⁶ The illegal version of the drug can be made to look like candy and given to a child, a significant feature considering that the age group of children with the highest rate of increase in deaths from fentanyl is under 14.^{7,8} We need to be protecting children from this danger.

Child Trafficking

About 460,000 children in the U.S. are reported missing yearly.⁹ The National Crime Information Center (NCIC) reported

that as of Dec 31, 2021, more than 521,000 missing person reports were filed. After files were purged, more than 39,000 remaining active files were of juveniles under the age of 21, most of whom were classified as runaways. Records were removed when the child was located or returned home.¹⁰ Runaways are at higher risk of sexual exploitation; some estimates suggest that up to 44% of runaways experience sexual trafficking.¹¹

What happened to those tens of thousands of children reported missing who were never found? Also seldom considered are the many thousands of children who have been brought across our southern border by cartels, like merchandise. Children in these circumstances are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking. If they are taken by traffickers, who will report them as missing?

Child sex trafficking is recognized as a problem in many countries, but it has not received much media attention in the U.S. until recent years. Efforts to bring it to public attention are met with resistance or silence. The crisis is real in our country, and there are indicators that help paint the picture of a complex hidden problem. For example, Statista Research Department published data in October 2022 disclosing that 32,079 children younger than age 10 and 51,434 children between age 11 and 15 were victims of sexual assault in 2021.¹²

In July 2016, Lori Handrehan noted that an epidemic of child sex trafficking and pedophilia was sweeping America, and that the U.S. "may be producing and distributing an estimated half of the world's rape and torture videos and images." In 2014, Australian authorities estimated 80,000 children had been trafficked for rape and torture to produce videos and images hosted on internet servers, the majority of which were based in the U.S.¹³ Where is the outrage over these crimes against humanity?

The Marketplaces: Public Schools and Internet

Children have access to illicit drugs in public schools and on the internet. Child sex traffickers use the internet as an access point and a hangout for predators. Yet parents and schools alike put electronic devices into the hands of vulnerable children, who may then fall into the hands of criminals.

Children encounter individuals selling drugs at school, and nearly half of high school students know of another student who sells drugs at the school.¹⁴ Social media sites are also a common place for interaction with sexual predators and drug dealers. Safeguards in electronic devices can be readily bypassed, giving access to illicit drug marketplaces through apps such as Instagram. The algorithms used by Instagram and other apps have been shown to promote additional drug accounts to children who have followed any single account selling drugs.¹⁵ According to Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent Robert Murphy, today's drug dealers can more easily access vulnerable children online through social media. "Drug dealers connect with kids online through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube."⁸

Digital media are already known to be harmful to children's brain development, causing interrupted sleep patterns and addictive psychological disorders. Pediatrician Michael Rich, at the Center on Media and Child Health at Boston Children's Hospital, notes that screen time is not the main problem. Rather, digital media provide an "impoverished" stimulation of the developing brain compared to reality. It interferes with creativity and promotes development of obsessive behavior patterns.¹⁶

In a November 2016 publication, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recognized that digital media are associated with sleep disorders, obesity, depression, and exploitation by child sex offenders.¹⁷ When digital media is providing unwanted access to predators, it is difficult to justify providing electronic devices to children, even if "safeguards" are in place.

The internet creates a constant exposure to online advertisement and social pressures that pose a threat to children, who encounter porn, violence, cyber bullying, and drug solicitation online. By the time they are 12 years old, most children have been exposed to porn, and 73% of all teenagers in the U.S. are exposed to pornography.¹⁸ A Mississippi state audit of middle and high school computers in 2017 found that 20% contained sexually explicit materials or pornography. The filters and other safeguards that had been put in place were ineffective in preventing that exposure.¹⁹

The sexualization of children through media and in schools contributes to their vulnerability. Schoolchildren are made even more vulnerable to sexual predators by soft grooming in the form of sex education. Gender confusion and sexual experimentation, when encouraged by school counselors and other employees, make children more vulnerable as prey for online sex offenders.

Child Protective Services and Health Professionals Enabling the Abuse

Government officials enable the abuse of children through funding of agencies such as Child Protective Services (CPS) in a manner that creates a conflict of interest. This corruption was exposed years ago by the late Georgia state senator Nancy Schaefer, who discovered that CPS was a system of employed professionals who were financially incentivized to keep children in the system rather than returning them to their parents. Sen. Schaefer's 2008 report,²⁰ "The Corrupt Business of Child Protective Services," cost her the senate seat. Based on her research, she concluded, among other things:

- [C]aseworkers and social workers are very often guilty of fraud. They withhold and destroy evidence. They fabricate evidence and they seek to terminate parental rights unnecessarily. However, when charges are made against Child Protective Services, the charges are ignored;
- [T]he separation of families and the "snatching of children" is growing as a business because local governments have grown accustomed to having these taxpayer dollars to balance their ever-expanding budgets....
- Child Protective Services and Juvenile Court can always hide behind a confidentiality clause in order to protect their decisions and keep the funds flowing. There should be open records and "court watches"! Look who is being paid!...
- [T]he Adoption and the Safe Families Act, set in motion first in 1974 by Walter Mondale and later in 1997 by

President Bill Clinton, offered cash "bonuses" to the states for every child they adopted out of foster care. In order to receive the "adoption incentive bonuses" local child protective services need more children. They must have merchandise (children) that sells and you must have plenty so the buyer can choose....

She observed: "Parents do not realize that the social workers are the glue that hold 'the system' together that funds the court, funds the court-appointed attorneys, and multiple other jobs, including the 'system's' psychiatrists, therapists, their own attorneys and others."²⁰

When Sen. Schaefer died in 2010 of a gunshot wound suspiciously ruled a murder-suicide, many believed she was murdered for her role in exposing corruption in the CPS system. Her report is well worth the read.

Sen. Schaefer was vocal about the role of mental hospitals and psychiatrists who accept bonuses for keeping children in the system who do not need to be there. Overmedication is a common problem in foster care, where more than a third of children are prescribed psychotropic drugs.²¹ Physicians are routinely used as proxies for the harm done to children—they have increasingly given up using their own discernment in favor of check-box treatment protocols written by third parties. The medical profession seems incapable of breaking free from big pharma and third-party overseers. It is past time to reclaim our profession of healing.

Combating Child Sex Trafficking—A National Priority

No U.S. President since Lincoln has fought against human trafficking as vigorously as President Donald Trump has. Drug and human trafficking are still common themes in his public speeches. He pointed out that the internet is part of the problem. On Jan 31, 2020, he issued Executive Order 13903 Combating Human Trafficking And Online Child Exploitation In The United States:²²

Twenty-first century technology and the proliferation of the internet and mobile devices have helped facilitate the crime of child sex trafficking and other forms of child exploitation. Consequently, the number of reports to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children of online photos and videos of children being sexually abused is at record levels.

When President Trump signed the executive order expanding efforts to combat human trafficking, he stated, "Human trafficking is worse than it ever has been before, and that's because of the internet."²³

The Trump Administration was committed to combating and eliminating this scourge on our children. The pervasive nature of online sexual predation of children is brought to light when human trafficking task forces coordinate to apprehend the perpetrators. A nationwide bust of 2,300 online child sex offenders in June of 2018 revealed that most of the online abuse victims were under age 13. Then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions stated, "In recent years, certain forms of modern technology have facilitated the spread of child pornography and created greater incentives for its production."²⁴

The use of the internet to increase demand and distribution of child porn cannot be underestimated, as revealed in the recent discovery in Germany of a gang of pedophiles that had produced 600 TB of videos of rape and torture of boys.²⁵

Numerous news articles in the past few years indicate that law enforcement is successfully arresting human trafficking

perpetrators. The problem is nationwide, involving individuals at all levels of society, including law enforcement, government officials, churches, and street gangs. Just recently, Operation Reclaim and Rebuild in California resulted in the arrest of 368 people and the rescue of 131 victims, including six juveniles.²⁶ It is encouraging to see these reports, but at the same time troubling that there are so many cases.

Conclusions

Drug dealers and human traffickers are effectively waging war on our children, and they have made unprecedented profits from the industry. This scourge is shattering the lives of tens of thousands of children. If we cannot protect them, we will not be able to save this nation or preserve a civil society. It is overwhelming from an individual perspective, but focused law enforcement and a broader effort to reduce children's internet exposure may be an effective starting point.

Pray for our nation and the children, that we will find a way to end to drug and human trafficking. With the help of God, we will give our children a chance to grow up in a healthier, safer world.

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